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PINGREE ASKS GAO TO INVESTIGATE CHEMICAL CONTAMINANTS IN FOOD: Pingree (D-Maine) on Thursday requested that the Government Accountability Office investigate whether the federal government is properly evaluating the risk of chemical contamination in food, such as the non-stick compounds known as PFAS. Her request follows FDA's announcement this week that PFAS — used in everything from stain-resistant fabrics and carpeting to cleaning products and food packaging — were detected in meat, poultry, seafood and other foods.

Although the science surrounding the potential health effects of PFAS are emerging, and current evidence suggests certain varieties of the compound may cause serious ailments, the agency determined that the levels it found in foods were likely not a human health concern.

Pingree noted that the FDA and EPA have a joint responsibility to regulate potentially harmful chemicals that may come into contact with food. For its part, FDA operates under a notification program for what are called indirect food additives, which are part of packaging, holding or processing products but not directly added to them. FDA has 120 days to approve or deny the use, but if the agency doesn't respond, the company can still market the chemical, Pingree said. Critics of this system argue it puts consumers at risk because it allows the food industry to bypass safety checks.

The Maine Democrat, who is a member of the House Appropriations panel overseeing FDA, wants GAO to look into how much the government knows about the safety of indirect food additives and whether FDA ever reassesses the research behind those already in the food supply. She also wants to know to what extent the agency coordinates with EPA and the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Senators unveil PFAS compromise for drinking water: The Trump administration's EPA is under pressure to regulate two of the most studied varieties of PFAS, PFOA and PFOS, due to their link to testicular and kidney cancer and thyroid hormone disruption, respectively.

Several senators whose states have environmental contamination sites introduced legislation as an amendment to the annual defense policy bill, S. 1790 (116), on Thursday. Their provision would require EPA to set an enforceable drinking water limit for PFOA and PFOS within two years, reports Pro Energy's Annie Snider. However, it doesn't contain language on a Superfund designation — a top priority for many communities that want chemical manufacturers to foot the bill for cleanups.